

Men I Trust by nervoussis

Category: Stranger Things (TV 2016)

Genre: Billy Hargrove Has a Crush on Steve Harrington, But he doesn't know he has a crush on Steve Harrington, But they're growing, Falling In Love, Fluff and Humor, Inspired by Sex and the City, Jealousy, M/M, Misunderstandings, Mutual Pining, slow burn?

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Summary:

It takes all of five seconds for Adam to say he'll cook Steve breakfast.

That he'll run Steve's laundry to the cleaners, and wipe his ass after eating his ass, or something. And it takes two more seconds for Steve and his boyfriend to get their tongues in each other's mouths.

Billy wishes the girls were here. Wishes like fuck his mouth wasn't dry so he could, maybe. Scream. Or rip his hair out. Or have Adam banned for life when the cotton leg of Steve's shorts almost rounds the curve of his ass, and--

Billy decides to have breakfast on the patio.

1. You Deserve This

Steve was great.

Top of the line when it came to privileged assholes, as far as Billy was concerned, and they were friends. Best friends, even; shared an apartment and a cat and a car when the midwestern winters fell like the wrath of God. And *obviously*, Billy would go to bat for the guy over a lot less than spilled milk but that was as far as it went.

Steve was pretty.

And he smelled good even on the worst of days. Was soft and kind and smart (though he sometimes pretended not to be), and Billy understood that much. He got it: Steve was the perfect boyfriend for the saps that roamed the Chicago streets, but.

He didn't understand the *obsession*.

Steve Harrington was a serial monogamist. It wasn't like he searched for partners, though, they found him.

Against all odds. Sought him out the way flowers sometimes bend with the sun. Steve's relationship would end after one (three, *five* years) and then, as if there existed a waitlist somewhere up in the stars, the next dumbass would come along like an unwelcome day of shitty weather. Taking up space on the couch. Eating all their food--keeping Billy awake with their fits of passion and declarations of love and he didn't get it on the most fundamental of levels.

The way Steve would end up in a bar the night after a breakup. Would take some sorry guy home with him, intent that *tonight's the night, Bill's! I'm going for my first one-night-stand!* but Billy was 96% certain that Steve was just a blow-up doll with delusions of grandeur.

Every single time without fail, he found himself in another long-term relationship and it was *disgusting* the way it happened.

Like a scene from a goddamn movie.

You know the one.

Lights up on the cheerfully dopey protagonist and his cynical best friends. The bar, the room, the love interest watching from under the twinkly lights as Steve floats into view. Naked on a goddamn cloud or whatever, and the guy sees angels. Hear harps and shit as their eyes lock across the space and blah, blah, blah.

Billy thought it was fucking freaky, but obviously, everyone else knew something he didn't because Steve was always in a relationship.

Healthy relationships, too, where you'd think 'okay, this is endgame,' and then...Steve would break some poor guy's heart for seemingly no reason at all. They'd be together for months or years when one day Steve would call it quits. And Billy would stumble home after a shift at Glamour to find Steve on the couch with a pint of *Ben & Jerry's* brownie core, crying into his sweater like he wasn't the owner of the Broken Hearts Club.

Like he was the dumpee and not the dumper.

And Billy would play along. Give the kid sympathy and a reluctant shoulder to cry on because, well.

Science.

"I just don't feel it," Steve said. "I'm looking for love. *Real* love, a: can't live, can't breathe, can't think without you kind of connection. The: I'm *consumed* with thoughts of you--"

"Not possible, cheeks." Billy snatched the spoon from him and dug into the ice cream. "Kinda shit you're looking for only happens in movies. Love letters and boom boxes under the window and *let down your hair* from some guy you hardly know."

"Bullshit."

Billy squinted as Steve leaned forward to snatch the ice cream away. He grinned. "No, it's absolutely true, Harrington. You want prince charming to ride in on his horse, fuck you into next week *and* hold your hand after, which." Billy tickled Steve's sock foot, grinning wider as he squealed.

"That kinda shit only happens in movies." Billy licked the spoon and

threw it at Steve's head.

He reached for it clumsily, wincing as it fumbled to the ground. Steve swallowed, spoon disappearing under a mountain of chocolate fudge ice cream. "And I don't want some guy I hardly know, just. Someone special."

And Billy was fucking confused.

Who *was* Steve Harrington, that he could make those kinds of demands from the Powers that be and, moreover, what was so remarkable about him that even the Gods of love seemed to bow at his feet?

Maybe if you squinted?

Billy tried it. Steve pretty much only wore big sweaters and fuzzy socks. Hogged the couch as they watched T.V., ran off sugar and black coffee, and. Billy considered him regardless, trying to get into the mindset of the endless parade of dumbasses he'd seen make a fool of themselves over those dopey brown eyes. Billy watched Steve scoop spoonful after spoonful of brownie core into his mouth. Watched his face go all blotchy when he declared: "That's it! I'm gonna die alone."

Tragic, Billy concluded. Absolutely devastating.

Maybe if you tilted your head to the side?

Steve rubbed a dribble of ice cream off his chin and groaned, spitting more into the air.

Nope.

Billy took another bite. Maybe you had to be born with it, or something. Gifted the ability to understand that Steve Harrington is a man meant to be loved desperately, and maybe Billy wasn't one of those (un)lucky few.

Steve flopped back against the couch with a sigh. "Isn't this where you're supposed to say something nice? Stroke my ego a little?"

"What'd you have in mind"

Steve picked at the hole in his breakup sweatpants, brown eyes thoughtful. "How about someday my prince will come, or something?"

Billy licked the spoon, thoughtful. "He probably won't though."

Then it was Billy's turn to dodge flying spoons. "For someone who sells wedding dresses for a *living*, you're fucking bad at this."

"Just doesn't *sound* like me, baby."

"You couldn't try?" Steve whined, which.

Billy was powerless to that fuckin' pout. He grinned. "Okay. Something nice, I can do that. But charming's off the table, 48% of my brides end up saying 'yes,' to a messy divorce."

"Okay, so no prince," Steve said glumly. "How about, *You're not gonna die alone! Everyone loves and definitely wants to sleep with you.*"

Billy considered it, just to let the guy sweat it out.

Finally, he threw the spoon at Steve's head again and reached across the coffee table for the remote. "I would but, I'm trying to stop telling lies." Kind of an asshole thing to say but it was worth it to see the look on Harrington's face.

Steve squawked, incredulous. "Such a dick, oh my god." He mumbled. But he was grinning.

Billy squeezed his shoulder and changed the channel, sighing as Steve settled in against him to watch *House Hunters*.

--

Adam was Billy's least favorite of Steve's boyfriend's at the best of times.

Always smiled too big, held on too tightly to Steve's waist when they woke up at fucking dawn to cook breakfast on the weekends. And the

guy sang too loudly. Used all the hot water. Called Billy *Sport* when he angrily sulked around the apartment with a bad hangover, and okay.

Billy didn't even want to delve into the homeotic undertones of *that* bullshit.

Adam and Steve had dated for a year. Met at a farmers market one Sunday morning while Billy helped Steve pick out tomatoes. The two instantly bonded and fell in love over their mutual adoration for pomegranates or something, and Billy had thought for *sure* that Adam was the one.

Wasn't happy about it, but.

The way Steve beamed like a goddamn new penny in the sunlight every time that cornball was within earshot seemed like a pretty clear sign that Billy's favorite twink was off the market for good. Didn't help that the two love birds talked constantly about buying a house together in Forest Glen, having kids, the whole nine yards.

Billy should have known better.

Should have seen it coming; Steve had a track record of despising clingers. Got the ick nine months in *tops* because, as Robin so eloquently put it; *Steve likes to be the needy one in the relationship.*

And holy *shit* was Adam like, top of the shelf, designer, limited edition *needy*.

His pathetic desperation left no room at all for Steve, so. Robin and Billy liked to take bets.

Liked to watch as Adam and Steve sat cuddled up on the couch with Hallmark every Friday night. As if being in a relationship = an inability to imagine how anything that didn't involve footy pajamas and hot cocoa could be worth the trouble.

Their little group had turned into a bargain brand three musketeers and.

No one was happy about it.

"I give 'em three more weeks," Robin passed the wine bottle over with a belch, careening around the door to Billy's bedroom to watch Steve lay his head on Adam's chest. She gagged dramatically. "Damn, that guy's like a piece of chewed-up gum."

"Jesus, have some faith, Buckley." Billy was grinning around the lip of the bottle regardless. Adam *was* like a piece of chewed-up gum. Hubba-bubba, stuck to the bottom of a boot covered in dog shit.

Billy laughed at himself; he was fucking funny, okay?

"I'm with Billy on this one," Heather snatched the wine, careful not to smudge her lipstick as the liquor dribbled down her chin anyway. "They're in love."

Heather was a messy drunk. Fun and sweet and so *different* from Professional Everyday Heather. From bitchy, fiercely loyal, terrifyingly confident Heather. She smirked at Billy and passed the bottle back, making a little airplane noise while she held the bottle to his lips.

"Drink up lil baby," Heather cooed, and.

Billy loved the shit out of her.

"They are *not in love*," Robin deadpanned. She sat up on the mattress, swinging her legs over the side with fervor. "Seriously, do you two not have eyes or something?"

Billy choked a little when Heather dumped too much wine into his mouth, cackling around the pool of alcohol in his lungs.

"We got eyes, dude." He ran a hand over his face. "Maybe Harrington and his boy toy of the week aren't all that interesting."

Buckley coughed, incredulous. "What's more interesting than the destruction of our best friend?"

Billy shrugged. "Watching paint dry?"

"Sitting on the phone with the IRS?" Heather reasoned.

Billy grinned. "Not being able to sleep and listening to your parents fuck through the walls."

"Calculus homework."

He took the bottle from Heather's increasingly unsteady grasp and passed it to Robin. "Sucking dick," He said with a wink.

"Sucking tits," Heather concluded, which. That was fucking funny; when the two of them got going there was no stopping it.

Heather and Billy started laughing again, leaning against each other to keep from collapsing onto the scratchy beige carpet.

Robin watched them with an even stare, smirking in spite of herself.

"Well this has been very helpful," She said flatly. When they didn't stop laughing she cleared her throat. "So, just so we're on the same page; the pair of you would be okay with Steve marrying that imitation human out there?"

Billy ran his fingers through Heather's hair, "Ew, no--"

"We're *saying* that it isn't really our business anyway." Heather slurred.

Robin stared at them. "You're serious."

Which.

"No, Rob. It's just. Steve doesn't date these guys because he wants to end up with them," Billy chewed at the skin on his thumbnail, watching as Robin drained the last of the wine. "Steve dates them because--"

"He likes being needed, *we know*." Robin tossed the empty bottle at him. "Your turn to grab a fresh one."

Billy handed the thing to Heather. "Your turn, Belle's."

She scowled, curling up on the bed, slipping under the covers. "Fuck no, 'M comfy."

And Billy was used to Heather and Robin setting up camp in his room when they'd had a little too much to drink. Before Adam, Buckley always slept in Steve's room. Spooning him under the covers while they giggled like school children, but.

Those days had come and gone.

Billy stood on shaky feet and watched Robin crawl under the covers, eyes heavy with sleep as she kicked off her socks and scowled at him to *turn off the goddamn light*, so. He did.

Kind of liked sleeping on the floor when he knew they were warm and comfortable.

Billy poked his head into the dark hallway, listening to the sounds of *America's Next Top Model* filtering in from the living room. Adam and Steve were probably asleep in front of the T.V. like always. Cuddled up and uncomfortable on their marshmallow couch.

Billy threw a glance over his shoulder at the girls.

They were already snoring.

Go figure. And they'd want a pizza after their powernap, so. Billy shut the door as quietly as he could and padded toward the kitchen.

--

Steve wasn't asleep, he was crying.

Sitting on the couch crisscross applesauce, rubbing the sleeve of his jumper across his cheeks which could only mean one thing.

He definitely heard everything they said.

Billy peered around the darkness for his least favorite boyfriend, a nervous sweat breaking out across his feverish skin because fuck.

Buckley was a loud drunk. A mean drunk.

They knew she got unfailingly honest after she'd had a few and Heather? That girl was just a bitch. Billy was Steve's best friend. His

adversary, his protector.

"Where's Adam?" Billy grumbled, sounding tired even to his own ears. He hoped against all odds that Steve had missed most of their conversation but.

Steve turned watery eyes on him, sniffing around something that sounded like a whimper lodged in the back of his throat. "He went to bed a couple of hours ago." Steve tucked his legs up against his chest, burrowing his puffy little pink cheeks into the sleeve of his jumper, and.

A knife to the chest would've been less painful

"Why didn't you come to drink with us?" Billy asked, folding his arms and, like. Trying to look casual.

Trying not to die when Steve let out a thick, wet laugh. "I heard what you said about me."

Shit.

Billy nodded because. What was he supposed to do? He sat on the couch as far away from Steve as he could get without making it obvious. Watched Harrington weep silently in the space next to him like a wounded baby deer hiding under a bush. Billy hated himself for being the reason Steve was sitting out here alone.

In the dark, with a pint of ice cream on the table in front of him.

He had to know. "D'you guys break up?"

Steve chuckled. Thickly, without humor. "No, but I'm sure you're expecting that, huh?"

"Jesus Christ, Steve," Billy snapped. He was tired and hungry and *drunk*; wasn't in the mood to talk about this the first time with the girls, let alone now. He ran a hand through his hair. "I couldn't give less of a shit who you're fucking or who you marry. If you *ever* marry, that's not--"

"You guys were right."

Billy stared at him. "What?"

"Everything you said. About, like, the clinginess and the neediness. Breaking people's hearts?" Steve scrubbed a sleeve across his face as Tyra Banks told the models they were going to London. The T.V. cast shadows across his milky skin, nose outlined in pretty springs of color when he shook his head. "I don't know what's wrong with me. It's like I can't be alone or something."

Billy reached for him out of pure instinct, making a grab for the ice cream when Steve flinched away.

God, he felt like shit. "It's not your fault people fall in love with you, Stevie."

"Would you?"

Billy choked on his spit. "Huh?"

Steve shifted on the couch until they were facing each other. His eyes were serious, searching. "Would you fall in love with me? Like, if you didn't know me before?"

And fuck if *that* wasn't a loaded question.

Billy swallowed thickly. "Think I'd fuck you if I didn't know--"

"Gross."

"Let me *finish*." Billy handed the ice cream back with a huff. He wanted to get this right. "You know me. I don't really believe in marriage or monogamy and you're, like. The poster child for happy, healthy, long-term relationships." Billy nodded his head like *understand. Hear me, please.*

Steve considered him.

Finally; "I wouldn't fuck you if you still had your mullet." Steve said. Like it was just another fact of life--inarguable.

Which.

Billy loved his mullet, fuck you very much. He shook his head. "You're a goddamn menace, Harrington."

"I'm not sure I deserve to be loved," Steve said thickly, tears streaming down his face *again* and Billy wondered distantly where he held them all, holy shit. Steve took a deep breath. "What's so special about me?"

And Billy had thought the same. Countless times, in countless ways, but. Never in seriousness.

Never to be mean.

Billy found himself reaching across the space again until his fingers closed around the back of Steve's neck. "Don't fucking say that, asshole." He whispered and, okay.

Not his best work, but.

Steve blinked. "Huh?"

"You deserve love, Steve." Billy snapped. He fucking hated this part, the touchy-feely bullshit. Where were the girls when he needed them?

Steve's eyes welled up with fresh tears, glinting like unearthed diamonds in the light and Billy shook his head.

"You deserve this. Everything." He said. Because it was true. Billy gave Steve's neck one final squeeze before he stood, clapping his hands together as if to signal *that's all I'm saying about it, don't fucking ask me anything else!*

"Pizza?" He offered, avoiding Steve's face and the tears he knew were there.

Steve cleared his throat and chuckled. Small, reedy, but.

It was something.

"Pizza." He concluded.

So Billy got to work.

Notes for the Chapter:

I legitimately have no idea what this is lol.

I have plans to do a Sex & the City AU--this may be the seedling of that idea. May just be a stand-alone thing, who the hell knows. Either way; fluff and humor and Pining for the Ages will ensue!

Please let me know if you enjoyed it.

Your feedback is like heroin.

okay lysm bye <3

2. Statues

Summary for the Chapter:

WARNINGS FOR:

Billy being a douchebag

Billy's an early riser so he's honest to God surprised when he wakes up just before seven to find Adam cleaning the stove.

"Morning," the dude says pleasantly.

But, look.

After catching Steve on the couch last night crying over a wad of blankets, Billy. *Kind of* thought Steve sent the guy packing. That Adam would be halfway back to Eden right now and not scraping burnt pizza cheese from the depths of an iron trap. No two ways about it, but.

Adam's dressed in practically nothing.

A pair of ratty Hawkins high basketball shorts and shredded muscle tee that belongs in the closet of the room down the hall from Steve's, a workout top that used to smell like grapefruit detergent when Billy would do their laundry in the same load.

That was before Adam. Before Tyler, even, so.

Now it smells like a Christmas tree that's overdue for the Polly cart.

And desperation.

And *sex*, when Adam stretches his arms overhead and Billy gets an eyeful of Steve's little kitten marks down the length of a muscular back that's not *half* as muscular as Billy's, alright, so.

"Morning," Billy says through clenched teeth. Safe and just as pleasant as Adam's, really. Totally cool.

Adam closes the door to the stove, wiping his hands on his shorts. "Sleep well?"

"Heather woke up at five late for a Pilates class that Robin had agreed to drive her to and Robin's a kicker, so. Not exactly." Billy pours himself a cup of OJ. Sticks his gluten-free bread in the toaster. "You know the oven cleans itself, right?"

Adam chuckles. Like it's funny, or something. "Steve came to bed smelling like char." He says, but.

"Harrington loves the smell of char," Billy turns his back to the counter, taking a swig of his O.J. to erase the image of Steve bent in half like a goddamn paper airplane. "Really gets his blood pumping, the smell industrial soot."

"Yeah, well. Someone's gotta take care of Steven." Adam slides up next to the toaster, next to Billy, reaching into the cabinet to take down a can of protein powder.

Billy's protein powder.

"Boy can hardly do it himself, right?" Adam asks. He grabs a mug, stirring cookies n' cream flavored whey into an arid mixture of rice milk and coffee before lifting Billy's Yoda mug at Billy to cheers.

As if they're friends doing shots together on New Year's Eve.

As if.

"Y'know," Adam says, leaning in. "If I didn't know any better, I'd say you weren't a morning person."

"No, I am."

"Ah, I see. Just not when I'm around, right?"

And.

Billy knows he's supposed to play fair. Keep his eyes from narrowing and his lips from curling back in a sneer when Adam clinks their glasses together and as if on cue, Steve wanders in. All pink and

ruffled with sleep, the cuffs of his jumper tugged down over his hands.

"Morning, boys," He yawns, leaning into Billy's space. "Avocado toast?"

Billy nods, grinning. "With salmon."

"Oooh, make me some?" Steve asks with a wink, and.

It takes all of five seconds for Adam to say he'll cook Steve breakfast.

That he'll run Steve's laundry to the cleaners, and wipe his ass after eating his ass, or something. And it takes two more seconds for Steve and his *boyfriend* to get their tongues in each other's mouths.

Billy wishes the girls were here. Wishes like *fuck* his mouth wasn't dry so he could, maybe. Scream. Or rip his hair out. Or have Adam banned for life when the cotton leg of Steve's shorts almost rounds the curve of his ass, and--

Billy decides to have breakfast on the patio.

--

Bumble is the greatest invention of all time. In the simplest of fashions and in the most inconvenient of places, Billy's swiping left and right on Chicago's finest because, okay.

He gets dates.

Like, even back before the drama therapy and the realization that hiding behind violence just made everything worse--he had no problem taking dick. Or giving it, or. Pretending like he was interested in the softer sex.

Back then he was a bad boy. Leather-clad. Bruised and messy, color dripping outside the lines with the face of an angel. Well, maybe an angel after hitting three kegers before curfew but the point was:

Billy's dangerous persona was irresistible to the girls he pretended to fuck--a guy who'd knock a creep's teeth in but still opened the door

even on the third date. His perfect manners were a hit with their parents, too.

Textbook table etiquette comes from a good family, laughs at the right jokes, and always says the right thing. Billy never met an overprotective father he couldn't make plans to golf with. Or a flirtatious mother who didn't like to brush his curls to the side when he offered to help with dishes, so.

In the end, Billy was the perfect distraction.

The parents were satiated, knowing their daughter was out with standup citizen Billy Hargrove which left them free to fuck Johnny the Jock while Billy served as DD.

And even when little Suzie broke curfew Billy always walked her to the front door, greeted the father with a firm shake of the hand, always prepped with an excuse.

Car trouble or traffic. Defending Suzie's honor at the drive-in--and with the soft curl of his lips, the parents bought it every time.

Hook, line, and sinker.

So he'd kiss little Suzie goodnight and that was it. No tongue or wandering hands, no ulterior motives, and the girls were grateful that Billy never meant to crawl between their legs like the more volatile members of his sex.

But that was before. Now, after the drama therapy and the proverbial twelve steps and the handwritten apologies, Billy has fun.

A night out is less about donning a mask and more about pulling masks off.

--

Heather's the beard that refused to heed the test of Billy's razor.

She stuck around--tried to fuck around before realizing, oh. This guy's a fruit tart, and Billy loves her. Protects her; is the wingman when need be, the asshole when guys don't see the quartz signals on each

of Heather's middle fingers.

There's no one else he'd rather get shit-faced with. No better companion at the clubs when Robin's got class in the morning or Steve's busy being a Stepford wife, so he calls her on Thursday night and says, "Let's go out."

Because he needs to. Feels it buzzing beneath his skin, the urge to fuck anything with a pulse.

And, of course; "I'm game." Heather says. All excited and breathy because they get like that around each other, especially with the promise of a good night out.

Billy leans into the couch cushion, jamming his foot under the armrest. "When can you be over?"

"Twenty minutes?" Heather pulls away and back again, like, "I got a new eyeshadow palette and I need your expertise."

From somewhere in the kitchen Steve's got the blender running. It smells like breadcrumbs and cheese. Like Italy came in and threw up all over the place.

It smells like Heaven.

"Make sure to clean your brushes before you bring 'em over." Billy insists.

"They won't dry in the taxi."

"Well, stick 'em out the window or something." Steve rounds the corner just then, donning the apron Billy got him for Christmas last year, the one that says *I rub my meat for two* minutes. Billy waves. "Last time the colors got all muddy and gross. You looked like a swamp creature."

"I stick these bitches out the window and my swamp look'll have flies to go with."

Billy falls against the armrest as Steve saddles up next to him, like, "Who's on the phone?"

Billy pulls away and says, "Heather," before Heather says *what*. Billy rolls his eyes. "Let's get food before, yeah?"

"Food after." She insists. "I like that empty stomach drunk feeling."

She's insane.

"You're insane," Billy snorts. "Twenty minutes and you're here. We'll pregame at McAllister's."

Heather thinks about it. "You'll do my makeup?" A bargain, to get her into his favorite bar.

"Obviously." Billy squawks when Steve pokes his side, and. The kid's eyes are big--wide and brown and creased a little at the corners.

Steve frowns at him.

All deep and dramatic, which can only mean he's bummed that he wasn't invited. Heather doesn't give Billy any time to dwell. "I wanna go to Tempo," She says. "McAllister's is full of fifty-year-old gays."

"We'll end the night at Tempo, you heathen." Billy pokes Steve back and tells Heather to get a move on.

When the line goes dead Steve doesn't say anything, which is how Billy knows he's in trouble.

"What's wrong, pretty boy?"

Steve shrugs. Fiddles with the hem of his apron, like, "Is Robin going, too?"

And Billy doesn't want to admit what he thought about. Getting his musketeers together, but. "No." It seems safe. Fair.

"You didn't even invite her?" Steve frowns at Billy and then glares, before frowning again. "That's kind of fucked up."

Billy snorts. "You're mad on *behalf* of Robin, who's got class at 7 am, and not mad that I didn't invite you?"

Steve's sad eyes are back again. "I'm not invited?"

"You're *always* invited, dumbass, it's just." Billy reaches under the table for his coffee tin. Sets to work splitting a grape swisher with his teeth before admitting, "We thought maybe you had plans with Adam."

Steve crosses his arms, huffing adorably. "I don't *always*--"

"It's Thursday. Practically the weekend, which means Hallmark is on the docket, right?"

Steve's flustered, like, immediately. "We don't spend every weekend--"

Billy stares. Not heavy, not rude, just. Curiously.

Steve flattens like a basketball. "I see your point."

But he sounds so bummed. Like the FOMO's already setting in, like the good ol' days have disappeared, with four single girls out on a Thursday and stumbling home with takeout just before dawn. For a single, horrifying second, Billy thinks Steve is going to get upset. Not just upset, but angry. Complete with his trademark chin wobble/crocodile tear combo that Billy buys in bulk.

Instead, Steve nods to the swisher. "Can I have some?" He asks.

Which. "You want some?"

Steve watches Billy lick the tobacco roll, nose wrinkling in disgust. But. "Yeah," He says harshly. "I can be wild. And dangerous."

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah," Steve says conspiratorially. He leans in, wagging his eyebrows. "I didn't even use the cutting glove while I minced the garlic."

Billy whoops like they're at a football game, nearly spilling his weed when Steve gets locked in the crook of his arm. "Attaboy." Billy chuckles.

Steve settles into the couch next to him. "I'm making Fregola." He says proudly.

Billy sparks the blunt, passing it to Steve after the first inhale. "Am I supposed to know what that is?"

"No, but it'll be good for the drummy." Steve takes a hit, coughing delicately into the curve of his fist in a way that has Billy wanting to feel the smoke rattling around in Steve's lungs.

He doesn't though.

Billy keeps his hands to himself, taking the joint when Steve passes it over. "The fuck is a drummy?"

"Y'know. A drunk tummy."

"You should trademark that."

Steve winks, eyes already red and droopy. "I might." He says with a lazy smile. "My hair is so big because my brain is huge. Like a big, fat, funky little chubby monster."

Billy rests his head on the back of the couch, like, "So many descriptors."

"It's true. It's what Adam loves most about me."

And Billy passes the blunt one more time, thinking how weird it is that they'd have something in common.

--

Heather wants blue eyeshadow and Billy tries to change her mind. Even goes so far as to pull up pictures of *80s Makeup Fails* on Pinterest to show that *this* is a mistake.

That they'll be laughed out of the bar if she walks in looking like a Degraffi Junior High reject, but Heather smacks the phone away and Billy picks it back up again, turning on their joint *get psyched* mix before fluffing one of the brushes that Heather definitely did not clean.

He tries to reason with her one last time. "You're not gonna get any pussy while wearing blue eyeshadow, kid."

Heather closes her eyes in preparation. "Not true."

"So true."

"The kind of pussy I'd want wouldn't care." Heather grips painfully at Billy's wrist, lips drawing back. "Get a move on. Tempo opens at nine."

"Jesus, *alright*." He yanks his wrist free, dipping Heather's brush into a powder blue shade named *macaw*. "The fuck has wormed its way up your ass tonight, Holloway?"

"Nothing." She snaps. Too quick and too violent for it not to be nothing, but.

Billy knows when to cut his losses.

Knows a fire when he sees one, companionable with the way Heather's jaw is set like she's preparing for war. Billy decides maybe the blue isn't such a bad idea.

After a few minutes, he gets lost in the process. Focused and calmed by the movement of his blending brush, Billy doesn't even realize that Heather's crying until *macaw* stops giving up its pigment.

"Talk to me." He says, setting the brush aside. "You know you can always--"

"Robin has a date tonight."

And. There's something in her voice. Something sharp and fragile that clues Billy in on something he should've seen. Noticed.

Billy closes the palette altogether. "I didn't know that you--"

"I didn't either." Heather snaps, patting the corners of her eyes. "But while we were wine drunk in your bed the other night she wanted to be the big spoon, so I let her be the big spoon even though I'm *always the big spoon*."

Billy doesn't get it. "Okay?"

"She tucked my head under her chin and told me I smelled like rose water," Heather says hysterically. "And I remember thinking 'rose water kind of smells like saliva. Or piss or something,' but Robin said it so soft. And Sweet. And her voice was rough from the wine, and she planted a kiss on the top of my head and told me she had a crush on me when you and Steve first started hanging out--"

"Oh god," Billy says, because. "Fuck."

"I don't know what to do, Billy." He rubs Heather's back, and just. Tries to be there for her. "I mean, this time last week I would've thought 'Robin? Never in a million, trillion years,' but--"

"Hold on." Billy pulls away, steadying Heather as she starts crying again. "Is Robin meeting this girl at Tempo?"

Heather bites her tongue, literally and figuratively, and Billy grits his teeth. Shaking her just a little bit, like, "Heather."

"At nine." She says miserably. "They're meeting for drinks at nine--"

"We aren't going, then. Heather, we're *not* fucking this up for her."

"Billy--"

"No, you always fucking do this," Billy says, working overtime to make his voice *soft* or something. "You always want what you can't have and Robin--" Billy looks around like Steve might be listening at the door. "Robin is *so* off-limits."

"I know--"

"Do you?"

"Yes, Billy, *GOD*." Heather pulls away, checking her makeup in Billy's handheld mirror. "It would be crazy for us to show up there, and I'm not crazy."

"You're not crazy." Billy agrees.

Heather hands him the makeup brush, closing her eyes once more. He's only just got the base on Heather's second eye when she peeks at him, frowning.

Billy pulls away. "What."

"Nothing."

"Spit out, Holloway."

"Wouldn't it be a fun night, though? Making sure this girl's not an ax murderer or a stripper or a Republican--"

Billy sneers. "What's wrong with strippers?"

"Nothing, it's just." Heather's lip starts trembling again and Billy thinks if she ruins her makeup he's going to kill her.

She sighs. "I care about Robin."

"Yeah, sure."

"As a *friend*." Heather clarifies. "A best friend. Someone, I'd be a roommate with. Someone I'd protect with my life--"

"Stop speaking in *riddles*."

"Like you. With Steve." Heather says, crossing her arms. "If you could go back in time. Stop him from meeting Oscar, or Mark, or Tyler--"

Billy frowns. "I had nothing against Tyler."

"Okay, Adam then."

Billy doesn't like where this is going.

Doesn't like that she's found the soft spot, the clink in his armor. Billy tosses the makeup brush to the floor, scrubbing a hand across his face.

Heather nudges him, like, "If you could go back and stop him from falling in love with that piece of cardboard. Would you do it."

Billy doesn't want to hear this.

Billy isn't hearing this. He picks the makeup brush off the floor, like. "Heather, that has nothing to do with--"

"Would you do it?"

"I'm not in love with Steve." Billy whispers, sounding every bit like he might be in love with Steve.

Heather shrugs and Billy hates her.

"We aren't going to Tempo to sabotage Robin's date, Heather." Billy grabs her wrists, like. "Look at me. Listen to my words. *Absolutely not.*"

--

There's a line out the fucking door.

It takes forty minutes to get in, every seething, heated second spent keeping Heather's feet on the ground as she peers through the trawls of Chicago night owls for Robin and this girl she's got a date with.

Billy wishes he'd smoked more.

Taken a shot or at least packed an extra carton of cigarettes, when he raises his eyebrows and Heather insists that, "I'm not going to do anything crazy. Swear."

But that's how their craziest nights always begin. The ones that get told around kitchen tables. With shots and heated smiles from strangers and promises of maturity.

I'm not going to do anything crazy.

Yeah. Right.

They make it into Tempo just as things are really starting to pick up, and Billy spots Robin almost immediately. Grinding against some redhead in a *suit* for Christ-sake, so he steers Heather toward the bar and winces when she slaps a fifty on the counter, orders three fingers

of whiskey and tells the bartender to "Keep 'em coming."

This was a bad idea.

This was a *terrible* idea.

Billy orders a strawberry daiquiri, waving off at least three DILFs who slide up next to him before turning to find that Heather has vanished into the crowd.

And just like that, the games begin.

Notes for the Chapter:

This took forever! Sorry about that!

For those of you who have been asking for an update, I hope this was a good one. Now that I've figured out where I want this story to go, maybe things will start moving along? We'll see.

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3. Magic Man

The room is absolutely covered in haze.

Everywhere he looks Billy sees the outline of someone who *might* be his unhinged brunette, but the farther in he navigates the more he realizes that Heather might've disappeared entirely. Into the mouth of the whale, consumed by a wall of bodies and groping hands with three fingers of whiskey locked in a death grip around her line of judgment, a room full of sorority girls left in her place.

She's floating into the open sea without a life jacket.

Without Billy.

He shuffles onto the dancefloor like his ass is on fire, snarling threats when people latch onto him instead of making way. Feels guilty for wanting to dance and press into the absolute Adonis that winks at him, but he's on a mission. Running out of time.

Robin floats into view somewhere between *Rude Boy* and *911*, hanging off her girl like a rain-heavy flag at half-mast.

And Billy would never admit it aloud, but.

His heart stops beating, a deer caught in the headlights of a car doing 150 in a 75.

A thousand and one possibilities of escape fall like bullet points. He could pretend to be someone else when Robin inevitably stomps over and demands to know what he's doing--a stranger, a long-lost twin Billy never knew he had living right under their noses this whole time.

He could break down. Pull out the crocodile tears and elbow his way toward the exit as a sea of bodies traps the angry blonde trying to follow, like some sort of discount Indiana Jones.

It wouldn't solve anything long term.

Robin would still text him a thousand times and show up to the

apartment after getting her fingers wet, drunk, and furious, and hurt, but at least it would give him time to think.

And track Heather down.

And kick her *ass*--

Billy grabs the nearest warm body to use as a shield when Robin's neck rolls in his direction, carrying her head with it. A wall of sweaty, impressive muscle floats between Billy and certain death as a syrupy, sweet smile spreads across her face and Robin's wheeled around. Pulled into a disgusting, handsy kiss that has Billy breathing a sigh of relief.

The coast is clear.

"Jesus, you're a lifesaver," Billy says, not letting his guard down yet.

"Glad I could do it for you, baby."

Billy offers a polite, tight-lipped smile, and.

The wind gets knocked out of his lungs because Billy's human shield is gorgeous, which. Isn't what he had bargained for, when the guy smiles and peers into the heart of Billy's face, dark brown gaze dancing around his features like he's trying to memorize something.

"What?"

"Nothing." The guy says softly. As soft as he can under the thrum of the bass. "Hi."

"Don't flirt with me." Billy spats, despite the warmth coloring his face sherbet. "I'm just using you so--"

"Now that *is* my usual type." The dude adjusts Billy's arms so his wrists are latched to a chorded neck that smells of vanilla, even from here. "What's your name, gorgeous?"

Billy peeks at Robin, frowning to see that she's danced her way even closer.

"No names."

"Alright." The guy chuckles, thick lips parting to reveal rows of perfect teeth. "That's fair, I could be a creep. After all, you threw yourself at a stranger on a busy dancefloor. Pulled me away from my friends to use as a convenient diversion from some ex-lover you no doubt want to--"

"You can stop with the psych eval, doc, this isn't a stakeout."

"Isn't it?" The dude cocks his head. One perfect, light brown dreadlock falling into his eyes.

Which.

Is just unfair.

"No, it's not. I'm single." Billy sighs, trying to look away. "Happily single. The last of our kind."

And the Dude grins at that, just. Huge and wide and so genuine that it almost has Billy floating out of his body.

Forgetting that this is a club. And they don't know each other. And this couldn't possibly *be* anything, in the conventional sense, even if Billy *wanted*, but. The dude's moving. Tugging Billy closer, and closer still, until Billy's sucked into the rumble of a voice that matches his heartbeat.

"Why are you acting like you're on the run?" The dude makes a face.

"You wanted for murder or something? Got a warrant?"

"No, and your pickup could use a facelift." Billy maneuvers their bodies, blocking more of the room with the guy's strapping shoulders.

"My girlfriend's on a date. The first she's had in years, and my *other* girlfriend, my best girlfriend, has gone rogue."

Dude smiles. "You sound like an outlaw."

"Or I'm *the* law." Billy snorts, "The only gay with any common sense. A sheriff who wrangles former cheerleaders and the band geeks who love them." He does another survey of the room, relieved to find that

Robin has made her escape.

"You sound like a good friend," Greek God says softly, and.

Billy tries to drop his arms. To step away, but. The guy just holds him closer. "We aren't supposed to be here," Billy says. And he means now. And he means in the larger, more Big Bad sense. He places a hand on Dude's chest, feeling his heartbeat. "We don't really do this."

"Who's we?" The guy asks.

And Billy hates that.

Hates the implications. "Heather and me." He says harshly as if her name alone fills Billy's mouth with salt. "I guess she's in love with Robin. All of a sudden. Like an oven mitt catching on fire."

The guy laughs, and Billy hates that too.

Instantly.

Hates the way it draws his eyes from their surveillance and ties his stomach in knots. Makes him feel warm and comfortable, here, leaning against Dude's chest like some sort of fawning damsel. The guy pulls them closer together, tugging until Billy doesn't have to shout anymore when he says, "I should probably go look in the bathroom."

Sounding out of breath.

Sounding weak.

The dude hums, somehow breathing the words against Billy's neck. "For your friend?"

"For Heather," Billy says, stepping away. "Yeah."

And he expects that to be the end of it. For the guy to nod and throw a massive fit. Call him a slut or a tease, or just go back to the gang who haven't even noticed he's disappeared. Some friends, Billy thinks, but.

The dude just follows him.

Off the dancefloor and up a set of post-modern stairs, to the much quieter bar area overlooking the rest of the club.

"What does your Heather look like?" The guy asks. "Just in case I spot her before you do."

Billy wants to say Heather isn't *his*, but that would be a lie. They're each other's responsibility, best friend, and burden. Billy peers around the room, grateful for a break in the haze. "Short. Brunette, too hot for her own good, sweet, annoying, kind of a homewrecker--"

"Will we find her soon?" The guy asks, pulling Billy to a stop with a gentle, feather-light touch on his wrist. "I'd like to buy you a drink if you'll let me."

And.

"Maybe if I wasn't playing Bounty Hunter," Billy says, pissed at himself for even wishing--

"C'mon. One drink, no strings or expectations, just." The dude pulls Billy closer. Just a hair, like, "You're breathtaking. And interesting, and funny, so." The guy holds out his hand. "I'm Oliver."

Billy wants.

So badly--yearns to feel those lips on his neck again, those hands under his shirt. The want only grows when Oliver takes Billy's fingers and kisses each one individually, heat pooling like fresh soup in the pit of his stomach.

This is a bad idea.

This is a terrible idea, so Billy yanks his hand away, stomping toward the railing. "You didn't have to come with me, you know." He spits over his shoulder. "I can get myself to the bathroom just fine."

When Billy looks behind him, the guy is smiling softly.

Watching Billy march on toward battle, his own gait open and

relaxed.

"It's alright, blue." He says. "S not like much was happening, anyway, before you came along."

And Billy opens his mouth to denounce that nickname.

To publicly resent being called a *color*, even though his stomach is doing somersaults, but suddenly Billy's got an armful of former cheerleader and two wobbly legs around his waist.

"Billy!" Heather shouts.

He staggers with surprise, holding onto her hips before pulling back, like, "Jesus, you smell like a lawnmower."

"Some nice women gave me weed in the bathroom!" Heather says, sliding to the floor. "I love it here, we gotta come here more often. Did you know there's a fountain in the bathroom? We should fill it with cheese and order fries from the bar, and then we can sneak into the bathroom and have cheese fries with the nice lesbian who gave me--"

Billy's gotta yank the hem of her skirt back down around her thighs, keep her decent.

He frowns. "Where are your shoes, Heather Feather?"

She punches his shoulder, like, "I gave them to you?"

"Um, no you didn't."

"Um, *yes I did*." Heather pokes his nose, clearly shitfaced. "I left them at the bar and told you to keep track of them."

Billy wants to scream. "Why did you--"

"You *know* I hate wearing shoes at places like this!" Heather snarls, looking behind Billy and to the left all of a sudden, as if pulled out of a dream. She scowls. "Can I help you, honey?"

Billy looks at the guy.

The guy looks back, like. He might be enjoying this. Just a little.

Heather shoves Billy's shoulder, grinning. "You know that guy?"

And Billy says, "No," At the same time dude says, "Yes." Stepping forward to wave pathetically. "I'm Oliver."

And Billy wishes he'd never learned that.

Wishes he was home right now. Eating Steve's Italian pasta and, just. Minding his own business. Child of the Lord, or something, but there's a warm hand on his back, rubbing circles between his shoulder blades, and Billy's only human.

"He's Oliver," Billy says, not liking it one bit when Heather waggles her stupid, drunk eyebrows in his face.

"Oh, Billy has an *Oliver* now, huh?"

Which. "I don't have a--"

"Have you seen Robin?" Heather asks. She stands on her tippy toes, peering over the edge of the railing. "I've been looking everywhere for her. She's dancing with a woman in a suit, isn't that ridiculous?"

The knots are back, holding Billy's stomach hostage. "Heather--"

"I mean, you and I both know she likes a chick in a skirt." Heather turns, gesturing to the sparkly green fabric that has worked its way up her hips again, somehow. "This skirt. Robin loves this skirt, she told me it makes me look like a Christmas tree."

Billy yanks on the hem again, tugging Heather away from the ledge. "Listen to me, baby."

She pouts.

Billy hates that. "Are you listening?"

"Yes," Heather whines. "*God*, you're so--"

"Robin's having a good time."

"With a woman dressed like a Lawyer? Doubt it." Heather tries to worm her way out of Billy's grip, failing when he steers them toward an empty table and Oliver stumbles behind, pulling the stool out for Heather and her skirt to fall into.

Billy tries once more. "I saw them. Dancing together."

"Is that where you met your man?"

And Billy sneers at the easy, soft smile on Oliver's face, like, "He's not my man. He gave me a leg up."

Heather stares at Billy. "You ran away, didn't you?" She cackles. "Fuckin' chicken. Chicken boy, mayor of Chicken town!"

"Well, what was I supposed to say, man?" Billy smacks his hand on the table, completely fed up. "Oh hey, Robs. What am I doing here? Oh, nothing much. Trying to land some dick--"

Oliver snorts, like, "Definitely not."

"Or maybe; Heather drug me here so she could make some big declaration of love that'll fizzle out in a few weeks *tops* when she worms her way into a relationship with you, only to realize that it's hopeless--"

"Bills--"

"Because you both want different things," Billy says, absolutely sick with anger and worry. "Why do you both want different things? Well, you see a family in your future while Heather wants to die a bachelorette, wearing those little plastic cowboy hats and doing body shots on Rodeo night until the *world ends*."

Heather's looking over his shoulder, eyes wide. "Billy--"

"No, Heather, I love the shit out of you. You're my saving grace, and my day one, and my best fucking friend, but you're a train wreck." Billy touches her cheek softly, trying to bring Heather's horrified gaze back home. "Babe. You gotta let sleeping dogs lie."

Oliver makes a noise. "Hey, Blue, maybe you should--"

Billy whirls on him, trademark snarl dying on his lips when he sees it. Her.

Robin.

Standing five feet away with a drink in either hand. A Cosmo and an appletini, bright pink liquids matching the blush on her cheeks when Billy asks, "You probably heard--"

She nods. Eyes glued to Heather.

To the truth.

"Where's your girl?" Oliver asks, turning on Billy, like, "You said there was--"

Robin's voice is soft. Angry. "She went home."

And Billy whirls back to his idiot friend and says, "Why didn't you shut me up?" Because.

Jesus.

Heather glares. "I tried."

"Um, no you didn't."

"Um, *yes I fucking did*. Tried everything just short of shoving Oliver's dick in your--"

Robin slams her drinks on the table, running all ten fingers through her hair. She points to the appletini, like, "That's for you, Holloway. Drink it."

And Billy sits back, denying that it's an attempt to squirm away, when Robin glares at him and jabs a thumb over her shoulder and says, "Out."

Through clenched teeth.

Billy doesn't have to be told again, slipping away from the table just as Robin says. "You're making things really difficult for me, Heather."

And Heather says, "I love you."

And Billy says, "Oh, give me a break."

--

Oliver insists on buying drinks. "We don't have to stay here," He says, shrugging into a coat. "Not if you don't want to. We can--"

"What, go to a secondary location? See what my insides look like?" Billy gets heather's shoes from the bartender, eyes wet with an apology.

"Sure." And Oliver grins. Dopey and soft. "Though I don't think our definitions line up."

Billy realizes, through a haze of anger and worry and the desire to eavesdrop on private conversations, that Oliver is funny.

It doesn't make sense.

Doesn't sit right, that Billy met this guy at a club, so he makes it past the exit of the club and onto the sidewalk before turning on him. Baring his teeth and puffing out his chest, a whole *mountain* of insults dying on his lips when Oliver tucks a lock of hair behind his ear.

And Billy, just. Melts. A little bit.

Hardly even noticeable.

"I'm on babysitting duty tonight," Billy's mouth says. "I can't leave my lesbians here. Have you seen them? They're hopeless and messy, and they're about to be blackout drunk. And then I'll have to wrestle them into a cab, and then they'll want pizza. And after pizza they'll fall asleep because they always make me sleep on the couch when they're drunk--"

"Anyone ever tell you that you're cute as shit."

Which.

Okay.

Billy frowns. Doesn't pull back from the fingers on his jaw. "I'm not."

"No, you are." Oliver insists. "You're like a kitten who's never been touched by human fingers before, so you hiss and spit until someone takes the time to show you love. And then you turn out to be a big softie."

Billy pulls away, ignoring the flutter in his chest, when Oliver doesn't follow. When he gives Billy his space like he already knows him.

Billy hates that. "What, you gonna show me love, Ollie Oxen Free?"

Oliver shrugs. Thinks about it, before pulling a pen from somewhere inside the folds of his coat. "Maybe. Someday, down the line." He tugs Billy forward, eyes sparkling. "Here's the deal. If you're up for it--"

"If," Billy says flatly, eyebrows raised. "And that's a big one."

"Alright, Blue, hiss, and spit at me, you're still a walking orgasm." Oliver works the sleeve of Billy's coat up around his elbow, pressing the tip of his pen to the canvas found there. "If you want to call me in the morning, I'm going to leave my number. Right here."

Billy glares at him, like, "You don't wanna try and sleep with me?"

"Oh, I wanna try, just." Oliver draws a heart after his name, smiling. "Not tonight."

And Billy doesn't know what to do with that.

How to move forward, so.

He yanks his arm away, rubbing at dried ink as if burned.

--

Billy parks himself at the bar. Makes good on the 50 Heather left behind and gets a proper, delicate shit face painted on before his idiots stumble across the dancefloor.

Grinning, drunk as shit, and.

Holding hands.

Oh boy.

Robin throws an arm around Billy's shoulders. "Can we have your room tonight, Biller?"

And Billy helps Heather into her shoes, like, "Don't have sex in my room, Buckley, I just changed the sheets."

"No sex!" She hollers, dragging them both toward the exit. "Just cuddles and pizza and--"

"Steve made Fregola," Billy says fondly.

Because Steve *did* make fregola.

And shit.

Billy misses Steve. "Can we go home now?"

Heather climbs onto his back, ass out. "Is Oliver coming with?"

"He doesn't want to fuck me."

"*What?*" Robin turns on him, nearly falling into the street. "That's bullshit, Heather, isn't that--"

Heather's legs squeeze around his waist, like, "That's shit. So much shit, like, *mountains* and piles."

"He does wanna fuck, dorks, just." Billy hikes the lesbian higher up his back, grinning. "He gave me his number."

Robin blinks at him. "You gonna call?"

"You should call, Billy!" Heather screams, like. *Right* in his ear. "Call Ollie pollie and ask him to come eat Steve's noodles."

Billy snorts. "You're a trainwreck, Holloway."

"Yeah," Robin says fondly, "But I like it."

--

Steve's in his PJ's when Billy ushers the girls into the apartment. But sits up anyway, rubbing a hand across his face like maybe he was about to pass out in front of *Say Yes to the Dress* when Robin cannonballs into his lap and demands to know where the noodles are.

"Give me the noodles, Steve." She says. "I know you have the noodles and I want them, so give them to me."

Steve chuckles, raising an eyebrow at Billy. "Shoulda known the shepherd would bring the flock home."

"S your fault for falling asleep, grandpa," Billy says, dropping Heather onto the couch just as she rolls off, ass out *again*, before dragging Robin to the bathroom.

The door slams shut behind them, and.

It's silent.

Billy uses his toes to get each boot off.

Steve peers up at him. Looking soft and comfortable and a little sad, maybe, when he asks, "Did you have fun?"

"Not as much as you, pretty boy." Billy collapses onto the couch, worming his way into Steve's space and laying his head against Steve's warm thigh. He pokes him, like, "Missed you."

There are fingers in Billy's hair. "You smell like strawberries."

"I had a daiquiri," Billy says proudly. And. "I think I met someone."

The fingers stop their movement.

Steve doesn't say anything for a while. And then, "You never meet anyone. You hate meeting people."

"His name is Oliver."

"Did you sleep with him?" Steve asks lightly, but.

It doesn't feel light.

It feels. Cosmic.

Billy sits, face inches from Steve's. "No? I'm not a whore."

Steve won't look at him. "I never said you're a whore, It's just." He swallows, cheeks red with *something* that Billy wants to slice out of him. "You've been known to fuck people in bathrooms. Or under boardwalks. Or on park benches, when the sun's setting, so I just assumed--"

Billy yanks his sleeve up, shoving his arm in Steve's face. "He gave me his number."

And.

Steve looks at the blue ink tattoo for a while, expression unreadable.

Finally, he offers a tight, uneasy smile. "You gonna call him?" He asks softly.

"I wasn't sure at first but I think he might be good for me, you know." Billy sucks his teeth. "Teach me some morals or something. How to keep my legs together."

Steve looks hurt.

He reaches out, fingers just missing Billy's cheek as he pulls away.

"Billy," Steve says, but.

The girls are back and there's a flurry of movement and noise. Two drunk toddlers demanding to suck on Steve's noodle and Billy forgets what they were talking about.

Notes for the Chapter:

Trouble in paradise :/

This work is inspired by Sex and the City so there

will be romance and many partners who come and go, but Billy and Steve will get their happy ending. You have my word as a whore <3

4. I'm Only Happy When it Rains

Summary for the Chapter:

A period of adjustment

Warnings for:

Sort-of smut! Our favorite kind here

Jealous Steve

Sort-of love declarations

More Oliver :/

Oliver wants to get to know him.

Oliver thinks, even through the haze of drunken friends and shallow threats, that Billy is someone worth knowing. Someone interesting, and funny, and.

Cute.

It feels like a trap, as Billy sits on the toilet lid in his towel waiting for the water to heat up. Because, really, what could Oliver want with him? What could anyone want with him?

Billy touches the ink on his forearm, tracing over the numbers he now knows by heart, humming that song to himself.

8675309--

"This could be a mistake," Billy says to himself, rolling his neck toward the ceiling. "This could be the biggest mistake of my life, because. Shit. When has meeting someone at a fucking *club* ever lead to anything good?" Billy's eyebrows find his hairline, and he waits. Dares the ceiling to form a counterargument. "I mean. Think about it for a second, man, Dude could be a fucking--"

"What?"

Billy yanks a towel against his hips. Shuffling away from the toilet as if caught red-handed. "Nothing, I didn't say--"

The brass door handle moves. Fucking, *jiggles back and forth* and then Steve's bedhead is shoving Billy's thoughts off the nearest cliff. "Thought I heard voices." Steve mumbles, slipping in and tugging the door shut behind him. Inviting himself into the bathroom.

"No extra voices, just the ones in my head building their arguments." Billy tugs all ten fingers through his hair.

"Yeah?" Steve does a quick survey of their surroundings, gently peeling the shower curtain back and nodding like maybe he found what he was looking for. "And what have the voices said, anything interesting?"

Billy opens his mouth and shuts it again.

"What's wrong?" Steve asks. Soft but impatient. Nothing at all like himself.

Billy collapses onto the toilet seat again. "I can't just call the guy."

"So don't call the guy," Steve says, but.

"It's not that simple. He was so sweet, and that's what the voices keep saying. Over and over again. 'Oliver's nice, Billy, he's cherry pie wrapped in sugar, wrapped in bacon covered in foil that's got little glittery Santa's on it--'"

"You're Jewish."

"He's still *nice*." Billy snaps. "He's still perfect."

"You just met him. Last night, Bills, you just--"

"So?" Billy touches the curve of his jaw softly, remembering thick, sturdy fingers turning his gaze. He smiles, like. "I've never had one before."

Steve blinks at him. "Never has what before?"

"One of those things you're always having, you know what I'm talking about." Billy snaps his fingers, impatient. "Two strangers see each other across a crowded room--"

"Oh, you want a meet-cute!" Steve says adorably. He grins, catching himself and wiping it away before it takes over the room. He sits on the edge of the tub. "This guy, he's not going to give you one of those, Bill."

"No? Oliver's so sweet. He's n--"

"*Stop saying he's nice.*" Steve tugs the shower curtain closer to the wall. "And stop touching your face and *grinning* like that, it's wiggling me out."

"Fuck off, those rosy cheeks you got practically split down the middle any time you find a dick with manners."

"So what if I like to feel cared for," Steve growls.

But.

Listen.

"We all like to be waited on hand and foot, baby." Billy pushes off the toilet, the towel slipping lower on his hips. "You're not the only one who wants to feel like a goddamn Disney princess." Billy shoves Steve out of the way, jamming his hand behind the curtain to find that the water's still cold. "What if I want someone to cook me breakfast, huh?"

Billy shakes the water from his wrist, snickering as Steve yelps and jumps back.

"I'll cook you breakfast," Steve says thickly. "I'll do it. Right now. Whatever you want--"

"I want someone to hold my hand."

Steve nods. "Yeah, okay, I. I could--"

"And comb my hair and meet my sister and wipe my ass and take me to the pumpkin patch."

Steve leans against the wall, frowning. "I comb your hair. And Max goes to the farmers market with me every Sunday--"

Billy sticks up a finger. "I also wanna go apple picking. In October. A lovely, hidden orchard where the guy lends me his jacket after he fucks me into next week against a haystack." Billy raises his eyebrows. "Sound like something you can do, sugar?"

Steve falters, face going through a million and one expressions before landing heavily on annoyance.

Billy steps into the shower, tossing his towel at Harrington's face. Silence falls over the room and Billy lathers up, relaxing into the stream and waiting for the door to open and close. Waiting for that to be the end of it, but.

Of course not.

"Hey, listen, I'm." Steve's shadow moves against the curtain. *Closer* to the curtain, Billy rinses the soap from his skin. "I'm sorry about last night."

"Aw, c'mon Harrington, the Fregola wasn't that bad."

"You dick." Steve chuckles. "I made the noodles from scratch."

"They were stale."

"They were *perfectly* fluffy and light."

"Bullshit," Billy spits water from his mouth, turning his back to the stream.

"Well, maybe if you'd stayed here instead of going out to meet your prince charming you could've had them fresh." Steve teases, "Not had to reheat them in the microwave at two in the morning like some kind of cave creature." Steve falls silent for a moment, and then; "You really like this guy?"

Billy pretends not to hear.

Pretends not to be affected when Steve sits on the edge of the tub again and buries his head in his hands. The breath he takes moves the curtain, makes the fabric stick to Billy's skin.

"I just don't want to see you get heartbroken." Steve turns and pulls the curtain to the side, tugging until Billy's met with an eyeful of sincere idiot. "I've never seen you chase somebody before--"

"Who said I'm chasing?" Billy smirks, reaching for his shampoo and frowning when Steve grabs it for him.

"Let me," Steve says, fiddling with the bottle, eyes bright when he looks back up. "I can only do a few of the things on your list, so. Let me."

Let me take care of you.

Billy frowns. "You want to wash my hair?"

Steve just rolls up his sleeves, turning off the water as Billy steps back to make room. The drain is closed and the faucet is turned on, warm, sudsy water gathering around Billy's feet.

"Alright," He says lightly. "If you wanna."

"I wanna," Steve whispers. "Think of it as a big, fat, disgusting *I'm sorry* for calling you a whore."

"Steve--"

"C'mon. It'll only be a matter of time and you'll have some meathead to do all that stuff for you. Then you'll be falling in love, and moving out, and getting married. That's, like, the opposite of what a whore does—"

"Woah, Woah, Woah," Billy says, flopping, defeated, down into the water. "I just met the guy. Let's take it easy, yeah?"

"Yeah," Steve says, crouching down on the tile and squirting a glob of shampoo onto his fingers. "You're just. Special."

"Alright, baby."

"No, it's just." Steve begins scrubbing lightly at Billy's scalp, falling quiet. "I just. Care about you."

Billy leans into the touch. "I got it, Steve."

"More than anything, Bills. You're--"

"Okay, apology accepted, shut up now." Billy snaps, wanting to enjoy this moment because it feels good, alright? Sue him. "Besides, you're the one with a fan club full of assholes who drink my protein powder. If anyone's leaving anyone, it'll be you leaving me. Funny, right?"

And.

When Steve speaks again. Voice shaky, with a little, "Yeah. Funny."

Billy thinks maybe he sounds.

Different.

--

Things move slowly at first.

Billy paces around the four walls of his life for weeks, deciding what to do and then going back on it. Talking to the brides at work, demanding advice from his coworkers, practicing what to say with Heather, it's.

Ridiculous.

Billy feels ridiculous. Like a clown, stumbling out of loose trappings when his brides clasp their hands together and say, "Billy, you *have* to call him. He loves you."

And Billy has to growl and say, "He doesn't love me, we just met."

But the brides will start weeping about how this is *just* like the Notebook, or whatever, and Billy will spend the rest of their fitting wondering if he's letting something.

Someone.

Great slip through his fingers. Billy can't help but feel like he's making a mistake every time he sets the phone back down on the

table.

So he calls and leaves a voicemail one rainy night, three weeks after Heather's meltdown at Tempo.

The phone rings and clicks over, and Billy nearly drops his cigarette.

"Hey, It's me." He huffs, rubbing his fingertips together. "Well. Okay, it's not me. Well, *it is* me but you probably don't remember who I am and even if you did I haven't earned the right to be your 'it's me,' so. Hi. It's the guy with the lesbians? It's Billy." He stubs the cigarette out. "Billy Hargrove."

He wants to fling himself into the nearest ball of flaming gas.

He wants to go live under a rock, or--

Billy shifts the phone to his other ear. "Look, I. I'm sorry it took me so long to call. I just don't do stuff like this. When I said we don't do this, I meant me. Like. Dating, in any serious meet-cute, rom-com way, but it's like I keep telling my friends and clients and coworkers about you, and--"

Billy tries to take it back.

Fuck.

"Yeah, that's probably weird, um. I feel like I should give it a chance. You, a chance to disappoint me for real instead of just in my stupid, dramatic brain. And there's no pressure, like. It's been three weeks, you've probably stumbled across some real knockouts in that time and it's so presumptuous of me to assume, that. *Fuck.*"

He's awful at this.

Just. Absolutely--

Billy tries again. Slower this time.

"Listen. I'd like to see you." Billy lights another cigarette, inhaling sharply. "Let me see you again. For real this time. No drunk lesbians, no awkward wrangling, just me and you and a trough of beer at some

shitty bar in Dundee. So, I guess if you'd like to fuck me into a mattress or something you should probably hit me up. Later."

The screen reads *call ended*, and Billy considers the feasibility of dropping off the face of the Earth.

--

Oliver calls back.

By some ridiculous miracle, he calls, and for the next month, they talk on the phone every night about nothing and everything. Rising with the moon and setting with the sun, lost in a mirage of puppy love.

But the thing is; Oliver's funny. And sweet, when he does his impression of Billy trying to answer questions while half asleep and kind, when he listens to Billy talk for an entire hour, without interruption, about Max. And.

Suddenly he wants to meet the guy in person. See the little dimple on the left side of his mouth take root when he laughs at something Billy said and suddenly, Billy can't take it anymore.

—

Oliver picks him up for their first not-date in a suit.

A three-piece, gorgeous satin green suit and a lovely pair of dark brown penny loafers. He got his hair relocked, too, which.

Raises the stakes just a little.

Billy looks down at his own outfit. A mini skirt / dramatic button-down combo that looked gnarly paired with his demonias, and feels underdressed.

Like maybe Billy's whole persona makes him look like the bad idea Oliver picked up from the street corner on the way home, but Steve reassures him that he looks, "lovely. Like a fallen star."

And Billy thinks it's sweet. Says as much, with a little pinch to Steve's

ass, but.

It's also weird.

And uncomfortable, when Oliver pats a hand over his fresh dreadlocks and smiles tightly at Steve, and Steve smiles tightly at Oliver, and Billy wants them both to stop that.

Whatever they're doing, like.

This weird standoff they seem to be having in the living room. Billy shrugs a jacket on and tells Steve not to wait up, but Steve says, "I've got *Love Island* recorded and Chinese on the way at midnight." as if Billy's got a curfew or something.

Steve waves at Oliver, like, "Nice to meet you, man. Take care."

Only it doesn't sound like it.

It sounds like Steve just stubbed his toe. Or bit his tongue off, or something.

Oliver responds with a little, "Likewise. See you in the morning."

And Billy knows he'll probably fight with both of them about it later.

--

"We can't barhop for our first date, that's--"

"Thought this wasn't a date, Blue."

"It's not, you're just a menace." Billy blows smoke out his nose, cutting Oliver a sideways glance outside Bar 39, like, "Actually. I think you might need a full-time babysitter or something."

Oliver grins, and there they are.

Two perfect, shallow dimples on either side of his mouth. "We've already been to three bars, man, that's nothing."

"Yeah, well." Billy turns back the street. "I'm a grandpa. It's four shots and then home by 11:30 so we can watch T.V. in bed."

Oliver makes a noise in the back of his throat.

If Billy didn't know any better, he'd say it was a laugh. Or maybe a snort, some rigid show of affection, and instantly Billy wants to kiss him. Wants to drink those noises down, strawberry milkshakes with whipped cream and sprinkles, just.

Melting on the back of his tongue.

"You wanna go home?" Oliver asks. But he doesn't sound angry.

Billy frowns anyway. "No, I'm having a great time?"

"Really?"

"The best time." Billy pushes off the wall. Gives Oliver his full attention. "Your last round of *How Will I Know* really put it on a different level for me."

"I can top that one," Oliver says brightly. "Those other two were just a warm-up--"

"Do you have another karaoke song, or is it just 80s dream pop all the way through?"

"Do you really wanna go home or are you just scared to be alone with me?" Oliver shoots back, head cocked to the side, and.

He's so adorable.

Billy thinks he could take that boy home. Be real domestic, hop in the shower and emerge with a towel around his head, avocado face mask paving the way toward a *Halloween* marathon until they fall asleep on the couch together, just.

Very Adam and Steve.

Billy puffs on his cigarette, finally sighing as those four margaritas hit, and he realizes that he wants this. Domesticity, at least for tonight.

He pushes off the wall, stamping on his cigarette. "Only if you come

with."

"Come with? But isn't your roommate waiting up with Chinese?" And Oliver says it like. "Y'know. Smoking angry under a single lampshade or something."

"Why are you saying it like that?"

"Like what?"

"Like Steve ran over your dog or something." Billy shrugs, sweet and slow. "He's not just my roommate, He's a cool guy. And maybe you got a shit impression of him, 'cause he was playing angry daddy or something but that was weird. Taboo." Billy chuckles, thinking of how Steve's lips basically disappeared into his frown. Swallowed up. "I honestly don't know that that whole thing was about."

"What thing was that, baby?"

Then Billy opens his mouth to respond and suddenly Oliver's moving closer.

Looming, giant, over Billy's head until there's a tongue in his mouth. Pillow soft lips bringing a song to the air, and like. It's the whole package. Fireworks and butterflies in his tummy. All that shit-stuff Billy never thought existed in real life.

Oliver pushes him up against the wall and get's Billy's thighs on either side of his right leg, pushing and pushing until Billy feels like he's seated there. First-class, panting like a bitch when Oliver hooks a finger around Billy's bottom lip and says, "Let me see your tongue."

And Billy shows him.

Sticks it out and shudders when Oliver sucks it into his own mouth. Moans when there's a hand around his throat, not pushing, not threatening, but resting.

Stiff enough to make Billy work to swallow.

Oliver pulls back with a soft, wet sound. "I don't want to talk about Steve anymore, baby," He says.

And Billy gets it, so.

They're kissing again. Rough and bruising. Stumbling down the street to Oliver's apartment and jamming the key in the lock. There's light in Billy's eyes, warm and yellow, and something soft and warm placed under his back.

His pants are gone.

And Oliver's there. Sucking and licking, wet and lewd, and Billy's never come so hard in his life.

--

He wakes up to a million and one text messages from Steve.

Notes for the Chapter:

I wrote half of this while drunk lmaooooooooooooo
can you guess which?

My summer job starts tomorrow and I'm so nervous.
I'm hoping to remain here while away--hoping to
continue to indulge in the thing that provides me
peace because I do it solely for myself. The fun I
have while writing these silly little stories has kept
me sane and thank you so much for reading.

What was Steve freaking out about?
Time will tell

5. Across the Bridge

Notes for the Chapter:

Things Happen in this one :/ unpleasant things like breakups and heightened emotions and very few makeups. Holdfast to your tomatoes, dear ones, for this is only the beginning.

Billy always knew he was gay, but he didn't really *get it* until the first time he was forced to bunk with someone in an eight by thirteen cement block during his first year of college.

Being roomed with a straight guy will rip that closet door right off its hinges, because. Tyler was a sweet kid.

A poly-sci major on the soccer team who wore basketball shorts all year round and Nike slides for every special occasion and Billy found it difficult to be angry about the mess that seemed to follow his roommate around. Because, really, yelling at Tyler for leaving open bags of potato chips on his side of the room was like clubbing a baby seal.

At any sign of anger, the kid would start crying. Whimpering and snorting down the front of his rebook t-shirt about how he missed his mom, and how this was his first time away from home, and like.

Billy didn't want Tyler to think that it was okay.

Or normal.

Or allowed--the two of them crying on their dorm room floor together, opening up with a little heart-to-heart every time they had shit to work out.

Because for Billy, opening up had always been about as comfortable as sitting on a chair made of hot coals, so he kept his mouth shut after that first grievance. Cleaned the place without another word, organizing Tyler's reference books and sweeping dirt out into the hallway when he forgot to take his cleats off after practice.

It wasn't until Tyler tried to smoke a joint under the covers, lighting his blankets on fire and almost burning down Hewitt 110 that Billy realized he had become a housewife minus the sex.

He had allowed this boy, this. Curly-haired, big-eyed, scrawny dufus to turn him into a 40-year-old woman in an unhappy marriage.

Billy filed for a room change the very next day and swore off wounded baby birds for good.

But, the thing is.

Billy should've known he has a type.

--

Oliver's apartment looks different without a haze of beer and darkness clouding his judgment.

From the uneasy grip of a double-wide bed, Billy wrinkles his nose at the bare mattress touching his ass cheeks, the mounds of dirty clothes on the floor, and the wafting scent of rotting pears that gives way to bacon as he scrolls through the wreckage of a textbook Harrington meltdown.

Billy clicks over to his contact list and Steve picks up on the third ring. "I thought you were coming home last night."

Straight to business.

Billy could punch through steel. "You broke up with Adam?"

"I had to eat two helpings of Rangoon's by myself, Billy," Steve snarls, sounding like he just got done filing for a roommate change of his own. "My stomach is staging a riot, I haven't stopped shitting since--"

"Goddammit, Steve, *why did you break it off with Adam?*"

Steve falls silent, breath coming in short bursts of air that ring through the line. "Don't wanna talk about it." He says, and that edge is back. That slicing, pathetic rift cutting right through the words that somehow drive their way into Billy's heart. Planting under his skin.

Billy sits ramrod straight on the mattress, wincing at the dull ache between his legs. "Excuse me?"

"I just. It's been a rough night." Steve sniffs pathetically. Billy doesn't want him to cry--Billy *swears* if Steve starts crying he'll stage his own riot, but Steve doesn't. "I don't feel like talking about it just yet."

Which.

No.

Absolutely not.

"Fuck that, you're the one who put the bat signal in the sky last night."

"I didn't--"

"Just hoping I'd call. Just hoping Oliver was an asshole so I'd come home with wet cheeks and a bad attitude."

Steve sobers. "That's not fair, dude. That's so not what was happening--"

"Hang tight, shithead, let me read from the monitor." Billy yanks the receiver from his ear and taps at the screen, putting Steve on speaker as a string of messages dance across the oil-slick header of Billy's messaging app. "7:13 pm:" Billy reads aloud. *"If you need anything call. If he tries anything you aren't comfy with--call."*

"Just sounds like a concerned friend to me." Steve scoffs. "A good friend. A *great* friend."

"8:15 pm," Billy continues. *"Has he touched your ass yet? Bite his arm off if he does. Chew through bone!"* He ignores the warm, tingling sensation in his cheeks, frowning instead. "What's it to you if he tried to touch my ass? Or, fucking, Lick my ass or *eat* it?"

"God," Steve says unevenly. "That's. So fucking gross, that's like--"

"People don't try and touch my ass very often, Steve, and it's a nice ass." Billy continues scrolling through the messages, stomach

clenching and shuddering with every new twist and turn. He sighs, lifting the phone to his ear again. "I have a nice ass, and soft tits, and a cute smile."

"What's this got to do with anything, Billy?" Steve says impatiently. Sounding nervous, sounding. Warm all over. He swallows. "I know this shit. And I worry about it because you're so--"

"What?"

From somewhere in the apartment Oliver is singing to himself, wandering around what Billy imagines is an adorably cluttered living area if this bedroom is anything to go by, but he can't focus on Oliver or the bacon actively burning on the stove, because. Steve's shallow breaths on the other end of the line paint a picture for him. Cracked and saturated and deserved.

Billy realizes they've crossed some sort of line. "I'm sorry I made you worry."

"It's alright," Steve says gently. Carefully. "You're just an asshole who prefers to grow wild oats than check-in with his loved ones."

"The saying is 'sew wild oats,' dufus." Billy leans against Oliver's headboard, tongue poking the supple skin of his cheek. From the other end of the line, the shower curtain moves, little metal rings scraping against the bar, and Billy falls sick with regret. Wishing he could wrap Steve in his arms and apologize in person.

"I'll come home." Billy decides.

"You're sure?"

"Yeah, I guess." Billy throws his legs over the side of the mattress, wincing again. "Oliver's making breakfast but I can--"

"I don't want you to have to do that."

Billy glares around the room, searching for his clothes. "It's not a big deal."

"But I--"

"Steve." Billy snaps. "There'll be other opportunities for me to fuck this guy, you're not. A burden or forcing me to leave or inconveniencing me at all." He tugs his boxers on, hopping from foot to foot. "I want to be there for you, Harrington."

"Really?" Steve whispers, sounding hopeful.

"Yes, Jesus. So let me be there."

Steve sniffs pathetically, smiling through saltwater tears. "You don't have to. I can suck it up, I don't want to ruin your date."

"Well, the thing about that is we're now in the morning after phase." Billy chuckles. "I'll stop for gelato on the way home."

Steve doesn't say anything for a moment. Doesn't even breathe, by the sound of it, but then he's talking.

Laughing.

"Peanut butter crunch sounds good."

And Billy spent all his cash on tequila shots at the bar last night, but he smiles despite himself. Despite the post-breakup wreckage he knows is waiting for him at home.

It doesn't matter.

Nothing matters, when Steve takes a wobbly breath and insists, again, "But you know you don't have to come home, right? You can stay there if you want to." He tries to laugh. Tries to get Billy to laugh, but. It falls short. "You don't have to come back so soon, I can call the girls--"

"Call the girls anyway, I'll be home in thirty."

"Okay," Steve says, and Billy moves to hang up but Steve's voice rings through the silence. "Could you grab some batteries, too? My vibrator died last night and I'm not in the mood to plan any funerals."

--

Oliver tries to pack his puppy dog eyes into a box when Billy emerges from his bedroom with shoes on.

"It's alright, Hargrove, really." He says, wiping his hands on a lavender plaid apron that's seen better days, lips pursed in a smile. The picture of relaxation, of acceptance, but Billy doesn't believe him.

One look around the cluttered and bright kitchen proves it. The table; covered, end to end, in food. The speakers; playing Joni Mitchell as the sounds of the city echo from far below them. Light green curtains sway in the type of cool breeze that they only get when elevated fifteen stories above the Earth--it's straight from a goddamn movie and it leaves Billy feeling like yesterday's garbage, the way Oliver is trying to hide his disappointment by swallowing it all down.

Billy closes the distance between them, ducking his head to catch fleeting brown eyes. "I've never had a guy do something like this for me, before."

Oliver smirks, refusing to give in. "You're bullshitting me, have you looked in a mirror, or like. A bus window, at your own reflection?" He lets Billy worm his way closer. Lets Billy rest his head on broad, sculpted shoulders. His voice is soft when he says, "You're a goddamn Dream, Billy Hargrove."

And Billy pulls back, frowning. "I can stay." He says, half-serious. "Or we can have a pancake eating competition, loser takes dick instead of gives next time?"

Oliver snorts, finally meeting Billy's gaze. "I'm a top. No way I'm compromising."

"So am I, you're just cute enough that I gave it a go." Billy chuckles, looking and letting himself be looked at for the first time in a long time. "You're not upset? You're not devastated we don't get a round two?"

"More like three or four," Oliver jokes, hands coming to grip Billy's waist gently. "It's alright, darlin', your friend needs you."

But the thing is. "Steve always needs me, it's kind of our root

dynamic." Billy tucks a lock of hair behind Oliver's ear, fingers rounding the curve of his jaw and tilting his face toward the light. Oliver is made of magic--bronze and copper, sculpted by archangels.

The masterpiece frowns. Wrinkling the canvas. "You shouldn't do anything you aren't comfortable with. You shouldn't have to put people back together, all the time. That's not your responsibility. Besides," Oliver whispers, leaning in to kiss Billy's neck. "If you decide to stay for breakfast, I'll change my stance for you."

"What would your new stance be?"

"Oh, I don't know." Oliver muses, sucking Billy's earlobe between his teeth. "Bent over the coffee table. Gripping my ankles in the shower. Spreading myself open on the couch--"

"Alright," Billy pants, lightheaded. "I get it, I get the picture."

"I'm not sure you do," Oliver teases, fingers trailing below the waistline of Billy's skirt. He smirks at what he finds there, pleased as punch. "Well. Guess I stand corrected."

Billy might pass out. "Jesus Christ, you've got a mouth on you."

Oliver hums, kissing his way down the curve of Billy's neck, stopping to nibble and bite at the tender strip of flesh peeking out above the neck of his sweater. "Stay with me, baby." He says, thigh working his way between Billy's spread legs as if it belongs there. As if it's home.

Billy whimpers, gasping at the sudden friction in his jeans.

He should go. Find his wallet and take the steps two at a time, before the ice cream shop gets too crowded, but--

Billy moans, leaning his head to the side to make room for Oliver's tongue as it travels from place to place, leaving a trail of dark bruises where the light turns purple.

"Oliver," Billy tries weakly. "I have to--"

"I'll make it worth your while." Oliver hums again. "I'll be so good for you." He says, hiking Billy's skirt up around his waist.

The ice cream shop will be there in a few hours.

--

Billy stalks up to the front door at ten past nine with a bag of batteries and every flavor of gelato he could find at CVS. From behind the white oak door and the cute little cartoon drawing of Billy and Steve telling all visitors to "Fuck off," that Robin gave as a housewarming gift, Billy can hear music.

Loud, thumping bass carrying his fist to the knocker because the door is bolted. Jammed with something so his key doesn't work even on the third try.

Billy isn't in the mood for this. "Harrington, I know you're in there. Open the fucking door."

The music gets louder by a fraction, *Truth Hurts* giving way to *Girls Just Wanna Have fun*.

So Steve is mad.

Fuming, as his shadow moves through the crack of light under the door. Billy lifts his fist again, swallowing coals of white-hot anger. "I have four pints of Peanut Butter Crunch and three Cherry Brittle," He says flatly, shouting over the chorus and likely pissing off his neighbors. "It cost fifty bucks and a shining yelp review to get them to stay open--"

Steve kicks the door frame.

Full on, fucking, *punts* the white oak and Billy bangs on the door again. "Stop acting like such a fucking *brat*, Harrington, I said I was sorry."

"You *texted* that you were sorry, that's not the same thing."

"Well, what do you want me to do, fucking grovel?" Billy bangs on the door again, gelato pints knocking together in his plastic bag like loose marbles. "I'm sorry I didn't come running when you called, I lost track of time."

"You have a watch."

Billy groans, leaning his head against the door. "I tried to leave, alright, but I. Got caught up."

"You were in a dick coma, you fucking--"

Billy sighs, lifting his hand to touch the oak frame. "I didn't mean anything by it."

"Oliver's more important than me," Steve whines pathetically. From behind the door, the music disappears until the hallway is engulfed in syrupy, dark silence. "You're in love with him. I blinked my eyes, and closed my eyes for one fucking *second*, like. Half of *half* of a millisecond and you fell in love with somebody else."

He's crying. Shitfaced and crying, Billy can hear it, so.

"Hey, you're the one with the parade of nobodies trying to start a family with you." He says softly, moving the plastic bag to his other arm. "I'm not in love with Oliver, Stevie."

"Bullshit," Steve says to himself. "This is such bullshit."

"Please don't cry, Steve, please--"

"Go away."

And that pisses him off. "Open the door."

"I don't want to see you."

"That doesn't fucking matter, you dick, I goddamn *live here*," Billy shouts, wincing as Mrs. Byers opens her door, peeking down the hallway at him. He waves, turning back to his argument. "Cover your eyes while I walk to my room if you don't want to see me, you're acting like a child."

Steve blows his nose in something.

Probably his sweater, since he's drowning in booze, and Billy takes a mental note to clean it up in the morning.

Steve shuffles away from the door. "Go stay with your boyfriend."

"He's not my boyfriend--"

"Then go stay with Heather, you absolute dick!" Steve shouts, cutting off on a thick, ropery sob. "Nobody loves me. Adam's moving to California and he didn't even ask me to go with him and he doesn't love me anymore. No man could ever love me, not for real, not--"

"Oh for fucks sake, would you stop acting so pathetic?" Billy snaps, kicking the door harshly. "God, it just gets me when you stand there acting so goddamn pathetic." He lets it rest for a moment. Thinks it through, and then; "Did you even ask him about it? Did you sit down and talk to Adam about this big move to California or did you think the worst, like you always do?"

Steve falls silent. Deathly silent, like the argument, has taken everything from him and he's suddenly powered down.

Given up.

Billy opens his mouth to speak when Steve starts crying again. "There's nothing to say. He chose something else over me, he doesn't want me anymore, Billy." He blows his nose again. Billy wishes he'd stop that. "Nobody wants me. What man's gonna love me?"

And Mrs. Byers has drifted farther down the hallway, wrapped in her cinnamon-colored bathrobe. "A lot of men, sweetheart." She says gently, giving Billy this *look*. "Say something."

He jolts into action. "Yeah, Stevie, a lot of men." Mrs. Byers raises her eyebrows, so. "A whole lot?"

That doesn't make it better.

Steve kicks the door again, practically hyperventilating. "Don't talk to me anymore. Just don't talk to me." He sighs, long and slow. "Fuck, I'm gonna ralph."

"Steve," Billy shouts, banging on the door again. "Steve, wait--"

But he's gone.

"Shit." Billy jiggles the handle as if that'll do anything.

"That's not gonna do anything." Mrs. Byers says, big brown eyes saturated with feeling. With sympathy. Billy watches her watch him, sees the wheels moving behind her eyes. She gestures to the plastic bag on his arm, like, "Leave the gelato. He'll want it when the hangover starts."

Billy glares, like, "I'm not leaving."

And she seems to know this. Shrugging her shoulders, like, "Suit yourself."

And then she's gone.

Billy looks around the empty hallway, wishing the fire marshal hadn't made everyone get rid of their decorations so he could have something to rest his head-on. Billy reaches for a cigarette instead, not caring that their building has a strict policy when it comes to smoking indoors, before sinking to the ground and leaning his head back against the wall.

"Feel like hell," He says, to no one in particular, and.

No one answers back.

6. Demos

Billy is yanked out of sleep and deposited back to the cold, hard carpet of the hallway with the spread of five soft, doll-like fingers carding through his hair.

"You're alright," Mrs. Byers says.

"Was I being loud?" Billy asks, trying to pull his dream up from the hard drive tucked somewhere high in the back of his brain, but Mrs. Byers just grins.

"We didn't want you to freeze to death out here."

"M fine, Mrs. B," He tries to sit up. Tries to get away from the intrusion, but Mrs. Byer's is there. Soothing Billy like his mama did when he'd wake screaming from a nightmare. She twists away and says something to the pair of airforce ones on the ground next to Billy's face, and then a pillow's being tucked under his head. And he's being wrapped in something heavy.

Her eyes, when Billy's awake enough to focus on them, are soft like freshly baked brownies. "Sure you don't wanna sleep on my couch?"

Billy shakes his head and moves, wincing at the cracks that run up and down his spine and over his hips. His body must've aged a thousand years after laying on the ground all night, in desperate need of whatever magic juice made the tin man opposable after having rusted in the forest.

Mrs. Byers' youngest, Will, watches him with a nervous expression. "Did you and your boyfriend get into a fight?"

"Will," Mrs. Byers snaps. "That's none of our business—"

"S fine, Mrs. B."

"You know boyfriend is for teenagers, Billy and Steve are life partners."

Billy almost dies choking on his spit, but Mrs. Byers doesn't let him

get that far. Well-meaning and concerned, she rubs tiny circles between Billy's shoulder blades until he settles, boneless and a little pissed off, against the hard floor below.

Maybe.

If he wasn't so exhausted, and the pillow wasn't so warm, Billy would have it in him to tell his neighbors to fuck off. He settles instead for yanking the blanket up under his chin, kindly but not-so-discreetly *shrugging* until Mrs. Byers puts her palms up in surrender and points toward her apartment.

"I'm going," She says.

Billy nods and closes his eyes. He expects to hear the second pair of feet follow the first down the padded hallway to leave Billy in sweet, blissful quiet, but the floorboards creak under the kid's weight when he catches Billy staring at him.

"What were you guys fighting about?" Will wonders. His cheeks are red. His eyes are huge and expectant, like flying saucers.

"You're real nosy, kid."

"Steve's nice to me," Will shrugs.

As if that makes sense of everything. As if that's proof enough. Billy considers the boy for a moment before he sits, leaning into another series of alarming cracks that run down the length of his legs, this time. "Don't get old, Kid," He grunts. Then, when the boy won't quit *staring*. "You got a cigarette?"

"We're inside."

"So?"

"I'm fifteen."

"I was smoking pot at that age, I'm assuming you've never done that, either?"

Will scoffs, like, "I said I don't have one on me, not that I've never--"

"Alright, let's make this quick," Billy says. He's got about 15,000 bits of sleep stuck in the corners of his eye but is reluctant to scrub at them. Thinks maybe, if he leaves them where they are, the bits of gunk will turn into fairy dust. Wisk him off to beddy-bye land before the kid can ask any more questions.

"We fight sometimes." He begins heavily--

"It's because you love him," Will says. Like, *gotcha*.

Billy rejects that. Refuses to be caught in some gargantuan lie that doesn't even exist, so. "It's because we *misunderstand* each other," Billy snarls. "It's because we're always running circles--"

Will frowns. "In your apartment?"

"No," Billy concludes. "In life. It's just, like. Trying to make sense of the other's erratic, childish behavior without getting lit up for our own erratic, childish behavior." When the kid stares blankly at him, Billy swats through the air between them. "Trust me, you'll understand when you're older."

Will's pink, rosebud cheeks scrunch up like he's gonna hurl.

Billy flinches away, on impulse, even more horrified when the kid folds to the carpeted hallway in front of him. "Why does everybody always say that?" Will demands he sits back on his untied Nike's and gets *comfortable*. "I understand things. I'm fifteen, I know how to navigate life--"

"More like you know how to navigate the halls of the local high school."

"Like High School's not the *land* of misunderstanding?" Will challenges. He shakes his head, staring down the strip of carpet at that hideous potted bonsai tree that the hippies insist on keeping out in the open to usher unsolicited *good vibes* onto their floor.

"All we do is go to class and pick holes in each other's self-esteem, and beat down on the kids who are weaker than us, and set standards that everyone has to live by, even if they can't shove themselves into those boxes."

"We?" Billy asks.

Will glances at him, caught off guard. "Yeah," He says. "We."

"You don't strike me as one of the big dogs."

"What's that mean?"

"I dunno," Billy shrugs, looking up at the ceiling. "You're lanky and awkward--"

"Hey--"

"You wear Star Wars pajama pants and listen to music that came out at least a decade before you were born. You singlehandedly keep the local library in business, you can't drive, can't play football--"

"Jesus, alright, I get it. You make me sound like a pick-me girl," Will chuckles. And then, "How do you know so much about me?"

He's not angry about it. Not weirded out. He turns on the carpet, making a loud, crackling noise, to peer into Billy's face.

Billy shrugs. "If Steve's ever lucky enough to be in the hallway when your mom is she gives him the rundown and then he tells me."

Will buries his face in his hands, cheeks on fire. "God that's so embarrassing--"

"Yeah, because the gay man in his twenties who waits with bated breath for news on what's happening with the local youth really has room to judge," Billy teases. He waits until the kid looks at him. Until his face has gone back to normal. "It's sweet, what you said about Steve." He admits.

Will's cheeks turn red again. "What did I say?"

"That he's nice to you," Billy says bitterly. "He's nice to everyone unless they make me happy."

"You have someone who makes you happy?" The kid asks curiously. "Someone who's not Steve?"

And he says it like that must be a mistake.

Like Billy must've lost his mind on a cab ride home after drinking himself crazy one of those nights out with the girls.

Will shakes his head sadly. "It makes sense, now. Why you've been fighting so much."

Billy squints.

Will squeaks, backpedaling so fast Billy's sure there will be tire marks scorched into the carpet underneath him. "It's just that my mom and I have lived here for a long time and it's always been you and Steve."

"Just me and Steve?"

"Yeah."

Billy snorts. "Right. Because I just imagined the random parade of value-pack boyfriends that Steve has been lugging past your door for six years?"

"That's fair," Will agrees. "That's more than fair it's just--"

"Just what?" Billy snaps. "I watch him fall in and out of love with these losers for how many years? One right after the other right after the other, and I'm always working overtime to be nice to the fuckers while Steve throws a bitch-fit the size of New Mexico the second I lose track of time and can't be available to roll over for him?"

Billy knows he's saying too much. Giving too much away, but Will doesn't seem to notice over the speech he's working up to. The kid holds out his hand, like, "Give me a second."

"Why should I listen to you, kid?"

"Because it's probably weird for Steve to see the only person in the world that actually matters to him get carried off in some guy's big strong arms?" Will says quietly. He shrugs, eyes falling to the floor. "Maybe he misses you. Maybe--"

"I'm not getting carried off." Billy thumps his head onto the wall,

exhausted. "I'm not going anywhere. I would never go anywhere without him."

"Have you told Steve that?" The kid wonders.

Billy opens his mouth as if building toward something. A big declaration that he's more emotionally intelligent than people give him credit for, these days.

That he's right and Steve's wrong, and that's just the way it is. End of story.

But the longer Will stares at him with curious, searing eyes, and the more Billy thinks it over, wishing the front door would open and Steve would let him inside, the more his emotions sort themselves out.

Billy lays back against his pillow. "Steve should know by now," He says. "If he doesn't know how much I care about him after all this time, that's his problem."

"Billy--"

"I need to get some sleep," Billy says. Then, when Will doesn't move away. "Tell your mom I said thanks for the blanket."

7. Lesbians Love Cyndi Lauper

The hoodie Robin lends him at brunch the next morning is too small so it sits more like a crop top, cutting off at the most unflattering part of his stomach that Billy *knows* is going to pudge out after he's had his double-decker B.L.T.

He can't bring himself to care about that since he's going to throw it up anyway. Eight dollars that could've been more useful if he lit them on fire.

Billy's lesbians can't keep their hands off of each other. They've been attached by a pinky and a supple, raw hand to the hip since they rescued him from the apartment. Above the neck, under the table, *on* the table--nothing's off-limits. Apparently, people don't have standards anymore. And through the haze of early-morning fury and a crick in his neck the size of Texas, Billy's only 50% sure he's reading the situation correctly, but then.

Heather's cheeks go *magenta*.

That specific, custom-made hue Billy's only seen twice. Both at the height of orgasm, both unwelcome and shocking as he stumbled forward, trailing his own hook up close behind. Billy shoves his breakfast platter to the center of the table with an earthy groan. "Buckley, whatever you're doing to my Heather feather, I'm gonna need you to fucking stop," Billy says. "Like, *right now*."

Robin doesn't hear him over the disgusting, half-moan that giggles past Heather's ruined lipstick. She manages to flip him the bird, however, before pulling off Heather's neck with a disgusting wet *pop!* that has Billy waving for the bill.

"Relax, Hargrove," Robin says. "Don't snap at me just because your love life is on the fritz."

Billy freezes, hand poised to slap a random bill on top of the little plastic tray. "My love life is not on the fritz, dude."

"Is too."

"Is *not*," Billy tucks his wallet away and asks for another pot of coffee, instead. The waiter barely masks his exhausted eye roll before disappearing into the kitchen. Billy glances around the restaurant before leaning forward, elbows to the table so the family in the next booth with two toddlers and a foldable bassinet won't choke on their veggie omelet. "I got fucked against the kitchen sink three times yesterday--"

"Gross." Heather doesn't even pull away from her chocolate chip pancakes.

"He wants to take me out to dinner sometime this week, and he thinks I'm smart and funny--"

"Everyone thinks you're smart and funny," Robin deadpans.

"*And* he said he'd bottom next time," Billy smirks. "Because if a top is willing to bottom? That's how you know it's serious."

"Ugh, fucking rancid," Robin moans, "I don't think it's necessary to harp on this--"

Heather perks up at that, brown eyes sparkling. "He wants to bottom for you, Biller?" She coos, "Congratulations, honey bunny, that's great!"

Billy blows her a kiss, his good mood falling flat to the ground when Robin says, "What about Steve?"

And Billy has to rub a hand across his forehead to stave off an oncoming migraine. "What *about* Steve?" He snaps. "Why is everyone suddenly so worried about Steve?"

Robin shrugs. "We're always worried about him."

"Yeah, he's hot as shit but he can barely remember to put mitts on before taking something out of the oven," Heather concludes.

Robin kisses her cheek. "Could've left that first part out, honey."

"Yeah, but it's *true*," Heather says sheepishly. Then, to Billy; "I'm not saying you have to change your plans for Steve--"

"And I'm not saying I need your permission."

"Great," Heather snaps. She gives a thin, tight-lipped smile. "What the fuck is your problem, anyway?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean Steve's acting like a spoiled little limp wristed, penny dicked brat but--"

Billy and Robin make contrasting noises of protest.

"But he's always that way," Heather says. She squints at her stack of pancakes and then nods, satisfied.

"Maybe that's the problem." Billy clenches his teeth when the girls look at him with the same sad, pitiful expression. "What? I'm just supposed to forgive the fact that he made me sleep in the fucking hallway and talk to some random teenager who said essentially the same shit plus something *else* I'm gonna have to carry to my grave?"

Robin stares over his shoulder, eyes twinkling. "Oh. Hi, Steve."

Steve's hair is wet.

That's the only thing Billy notices before the waiter brings the second pot of coffee and asks, with his soul leaving his body, if Steve wants a rundown of the specials.

Robin orders his usual. Carrot Pancakes and a side of avocado toast with extra lemon. Steve shifts back and forth in his worn penny loafers. He has to push his glasses up the bridge of his nose when the waiter asks if he'd like coffee and Steve nods, water flying from the tips of his hair.

The waiter sniffs, dodging Steve and his torrential downpour of coconut-scented embarrassment as he scampers off to the beverage station

"Hey," Steve says to Billy. "Can we talk?"

He looks like shit. Like maybe he hasn't slept all night. Billy ignores

the worried twinge in his heart and turns on the girls, both of whom are suddenly *very* interested in the print of the tabletop. "You sleazy little shits, this brunch was a setup."

"No," Robin says. "Not *exactly*, but we knew you weren't going to patch things up on your own, so--"

Billy wants to kill her with a knife.

He throws his straw wrapper at her instead, ignoring Steve as he sinks further into his windbreaker, somehow. All but disappearing when Billy turns back to his gooey glob of hashbrowns, forking them into his mouth even though they taste like worms.

"Steve, sit down." Heather orders.

Steve ignores her, shouldering his way into Billy's face with a soft, inquiring sound. "Please. Look, I'm really sorry about--"

"Last night?" Billy supplies, sawing at his hashbrowns with the knife that *should* be pointed at Heather. "You're sorry for how you've been acting? You regret never taking the recycling to the curb before the truck comes or maybe you're mulling over the decision to leave the house with wet hair because it's cold enough outside to land your narrow ass in the hospital?"

"All of it," Steve says immediately, folding into the empty seat at their table with a glum, pathetic flop. "*Everything*, but especially the first part. And a little of the second--"

"Not good enough."

Steve's eyes go wide behind his glasses. "Not good enough? But. Billy, I--"

"You made me sleep in the *hallway*, you fucker."

"And that was shitty, alright?" Steve says, putting his hands on Billy's forearm and sliding closer, neverminding the knife Billy's got clenched in one palm. "That was awful and deplorable and disgusting, and I'm sorry. You didn't deserve that."

"You're right," Billy says, shaking him off. "I didn't."

Steve's eyes are wet.

Billy's heart shudders, hardly beating in time while he steels himself against the waterworks. He hates to see Steve cry, and he knows Steve isn't doing it on purpose, but. "Don't cry, Stevie."

"I'm not," Steve insists, wiping at his face. "I won't but I'm really sorry. And I don't expect you to forgive me right away, or to want to be my roommate or my friend anymore, after the way I've been acting--"

Billy snorts. "--Don't be stupid--"

--But I'm just. Fucked in the head." Steve raises his eyes, meeting Billy with soft, sweet defiance. "I'm worried sick about you, Bills."

"Me?" Billy snarls, tossing his knife onto the plate.

"Yes," Steve grips Billy's arm and digs his nails into the soft, warm fleece of Robin's hoodie. "You're my best fucking friend. And you've worked so hard to get where you're at and it takes a lot for you to open up. I mean, it took years for you to let me in, and this guy comes along and he shows the slightest bit of kindness and I'm just supposed to--"

"He *is* kind."

"I know he is. I *know that*, but I can't watch you get hurt," Steve admits softly. "You're just. You're the best person I've ever known. You love so deeply, so *perfectly*, and I can't let just anyone date you. They have to be as perfect as you, they've gotta be crafted from God's shit, or something, and they have to prove it."

Billy laughs in spite of himself, scrambling to hold onto the anger even as it washes away, bathed in light from the boy in the chair next to him.

"I can't watch you get your heartbroken, Billy. You're my whole world. I wouldn't survive it."

Robin makes a soft noise in the back of her throat.

Billy takes both of Steve's cheeks in his hands.

"You're a sweet little dickhead, you know that?" Billy teases, heart opening like a rose when Steve laughs wetly. Billy runs his thumbs in sweeping circles over those cheeks, frowning when Steve's smile falls away. "You've gotta let me take a chance here, Stevie."

"I know."

"And you've gotta get your drinking under control."

"Okay."

"I love you, right?" Billy says, pulling Steve to his chest. "I'm not going to forget about you just because I'm getting fucked into some guy's unmade mattress."

Steve pulls away, eyebrows shot to the ceiling. "He doesn't put sheets on his bed?"

Heather spits, like, "That's such a red flag, I don't even know what to say."

—

Things calm down a little after that, droning on into eternity like the dying batteries of a grandfather clock.

Oliver's around, like.

Constantly.

Once Billy's texted that he made it home safe after work Oliver comes knocking with a grocery bag in each arm, all, "let me cook dinner." And in the past, maybe Billy chomped down on that. Dug his canines into that fleshy sort of kindness until blood dripped down his chin, but he's trying not to do that anymore.

So he lets Oliver cook dinner once a week.

But once turns into twice and then he's got a standing invitation Billy didn't remember emailing, and Steve's got to tip-toe around the kitchen in sweatpants instead of underwear because he feels like, "*Oliver's undressing me with his eyes.*"

Billy doesn't even realize they've fallen into some sort of routine.

Billy hates their routine. In the molten, charred center of himself that used to masquerade as a heart.

The girls stop by whenever they want and one of them gets a key made. Brass and tiny but sharp as a knife, hanging from Oliver's belt loop when Billy comes home one afternoon to find him asleep on the couch and Steve, fidgeting by the shoe rack with his hands on his hips.

"I like the guy," Steve says uneasily.

Unprompted.

They're alone, for once. Sharing a pint of ice cream and watching *Gillian's Island*, while Steve insists that he's the Skipper and Billy's the slutty movie star that could've been a badass if the writers weren't bricked up all the time.

Billy glances at him, like, "Gilligan? Yeah, he's the hero." *You're the hero*, Billy doesn't say, because he's still pretending to be upset about the hallway incident.

Steve reaches out and pauses the T.V. show.

Billy frowns. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing,"

"Come on," Billy tickles Steve's ankle bone until he cracks a smile. "You think he's a good guy, so which guy are you talking about?"

Harrington sinks lower on the couch, somehow. Shimmy's a little until his toes are tucked up under Billy's ass to drain all his warmth. And he's got a little pinch at the corner of one lip. Small and deadly. "Don't be mad."

"I won't be mad."

"Really? Because you still expect me to fix you a grilled cheese whenever you get stressed about work and if it's not perfect I have to make three more. One for the train ride, two for the stacked afternoons of bridal consultations--"

"Wait, you know I'm not pissed anymore, right?"

Steve shrugs, looking away.

Billy rubs soft circles on the top of Steve's foot. "I'm not pissed anymore. That was years ago."

"It's been, like, a month."

"Doesn't matter," Billy says, trailing his finger up Steve's leg to rest on one thigh, naked from the soft shorts he's got on. Billy tugs on the leg hair. "Tell me."

Steve winces. Bats his hand away. "I'm talking about Oliver."

"Okay," Billy says. He doesn't move his fingers from Steve's thigh. Grounds himself there, instead.

Steve leans back against the arm of the couch, sinking lower until he's laying with his feet across Billy's lap. "I like the guy," He tries again. "But--"

"I never gave him a key."

"Thank God."

"And I never meant to give him the idea that he can spend the night whenever he wants," Billy sneers. "He's nice but I don't need fresh pasta every Friday waiting for me when I get home."

"Right," Steve says. "And he's funny, sometimes, but I don't need fresh flowers in the bathroom."

"Or brownies when it rains," Bill adds. "Guy can't clean his own uber nice apartment but he can fuss over ours. Disgusting."

Steve nods his head, hair flopping into his eyes. "What the fuck is wrong with us?"

Billy groans. "How would I know, I'm complaining about a man who treats me and my roommate like royalty."

"Maybe we just don't know him very well?" Steve guesses.

Billy shrugs. "I know him pretty well. I mean, he's almost my boyfriend."

"Almost?" Steve says, sitting up so quickly Billy almost jumps out of his skin. "Bills, you've been dating this guy for three months and it's not official yet?"

Billy thinks about it.

Does the math in his head, chalk and blackboard style until he's staring into Steve's big brown eyes. "No," He concludes with a shrug. "You know me, I don't really--"

--Believe in monogamy, I know." Steve sighs. "But you've been getting dick from this dude *exclusively* for a while and, what, we're bitching that he's actually nice?"

"You started it."

"I don't even know the guy, I have an excuse," Steve says. Then, with a gasp. "We should invite him out this weekend."

"For Robin's birthday thing, no way."

"Are you joking? A night out would be the perfect opportunity for me to get to know him, and for you to make shit *official*."

Billy frowns. "Maybe I don't want shit to be official. Maybe I have the tiniest, most inconvenient shadow of the ick."

Steve gapes at him, blinking three times before throwing a pillow. "Call him," Steve says. "If we don't want to die single and bitter we need to stop being so bitchy."

"I'm not bitchy," Billy snaps.

Steve winks, grabbing the empty pint of ice cream from the coffee table. "And that, dear William, is why you're Ginger Grant and I'm Gilligan."

Author's Note:

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